

July 2, 2024

Mr. Richard Champley
Program Manager and Contracting Officer Representative
International Trade Administration
National Travel & Tourism Office
Washington, DC 20230

RE: *Federal Register* notice of May 21, 2024 for the Survey of International Air Travelers;
(OMB Number: 0625-0227)

Dear Mr. Champley:

The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) strongly supports the continued collection of data on the Survey of international Air Travelers (SIAT) form. The data collected on these forms are crucial to key components of BEA's economic statistics.

BEA uses data collected on these forms to prepare estimates of international travel receipts and payments for which the SIAT is a critical data source, and for which there is no substitute. This survey provides data on expenditures of U.S. residents traveling abroad and foreign residents traveling in the United States as well as data on the purpose of trip and destinations visited. Items used by BEA are listed in Attachment A.

Estimates based on data from the SIAT are crucial components of BEA's monthly estimates of international trade in goods and services. The travel-related estimates are the 2nd largest of all the services categories, accounting for approximately 20 percent of total services in 2023. The travel-related estimates also are a critical component of BEA's quarterly estimates of the balance of payments accounts and of gross domestic product.

The SIAT is also a critical source of information for the travel and tourism satellite accounts. Specifically, it is our sole source of detailed information on how much overseas travelers spend on various types of tourism-related commodities (e.g., transportation, lodging, food, entertainment, gifts and souvenirs). In addition, the SIAT plays an important role in our personal consumption expenditures (PCE) statistics. We use these data to remove expenditures abroad by U.S. residents from estimates of PCE, allowing us to estimate more accurately how much U.S. residents spend domestically on tourism-related commodities. We also use information on destinations visited by non-U.S. residents in the United States to produce BEA's Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) by state statistics.

BEA appreciates the opportunity to comment on ways to enhance the quality and utility of the data collected on the survey. We have provided specific recommendations that we believe will improve the response rate and clarify instructions in Attachment B.

Please keep BEA informed about any modifications to these surveys. We are particularly interested in any modifications proposed during the forms approval process that would substantially affect our use of these data. For additional information, please contact Tiffany Burrell, Source Data Coordinator, on 301-278-9618 or by e-mail at Tiffany.Burrell@bea.gov . Should you need assistance in justifying this form to the Office of Management and Budget, please do not hesitate to contact BEA.

Sincerely,

Dennis Fixler
Chief Economist

Attachment

ATTACHMENT A

Items from the Survey of International Air Travelers Used by BEA

Items Used:	Use of Item:
Question 3a. Where do you live?	Travel exports; Personal consumption expenditure by state
Question 3b. What will be your main destination on THIS trip?	Travel imports
Question 13a. In Column A below, please indicate what is/was the MAIN purpose of your trip?	Travel exports and imports by type (business, personal, or health)
Question 15. How many adults and/or children are in your travel party?	Travel exports and imports
Question 16. How many nights away from home have you spent or will you spend on this trip?	Travel imports
17. IN ORDER OF VISIT, list the principal places visited or to be visited on this trip, and indicate the number of nights at each place.	Travel imports by geography; personal consumption expenditure by state
18a. Is this trip part of a prepaid, inclusive tour package?	Travel exports and imports
18b. If yes in 18a, which of the following does/did your package include?	Travel exports and imports
18d. Approximately how much did the prepaid package cost and how many people's expenses are included?	Travel exports and imports
Question 19. These next questions ask about the amount of money spent, or expected to be spent, by you and your travel party (travelers for whom you have financial responsibility). Please estimate how much total money has been spent, or will be spent, outside your own country. If you had a prepaid package, do not include those items you listed in 18d above.	Travel exports and imports; personal consumption expenditure by state; travel and tourism satellite accounts

ATTACHMENT B

BEA Suggestions for Updates to the SIAT

- In the main instructions for question 19, we suggest specifying that the following types of spending be included:
 - Spending made prior to or after the trip. We are concerned that the wording “what was the total spent outside your own country” could be misinterpreted as during-trip spending, which would exclude pre- or post-trip spending.
 - Spending made by an employer or another on behalf of the traveler. The traveler may not realize they should report spending made on their behalf because the question asks the respondent to report how much was spent “by you and your travel party.” This could be exacerbated by the pre-/post-trip concern raised in the prior bullet because payment on behalf of the traveler is likely to be made prior to or after the trip.
- Update the wording of the expenditure question (19a)
 - Reiterate that U.S. residents should report what they *expect* to spend. In December 2017, when asked by BEA to examine the very large increase to the nonresponse rate and to average expenditures for U.S. residents that coincided with the survey redesign in 2012, Skip Hull of CIC Research speculated that the nonresponse could be due to the change in question wording for 19a, which asks respondents to report the amount that “was” spent, which may be confusing for travelers who are just embarking on their trip.
 - Specify that the reporter should exclude international airfare that is reported in 19b.
- Expand the collection of spending by type (19e) to cover U.S. residents
- Slim down the expenditure by type question (19e) to remove the questions on currency and number of people included in spending (ask respondents to use the same currency as 19d).
- Explore administering an online follow-up survey to U.S. residents who indicate they would be willing to participate when they return from their trip.

Below we offer suggested language as an example for how our suggested changes could be achieved.

19. These next questions ask about the amount of money spent, or expected to be spent, by you and your travel party (travelers for whom you have financial responsibility). Please estimate how much total money has been spent, or will be spent, outside your own country **by you, your travel party, or on your behalf**. Please include spending made prior to your trip, such as spending on prepaid accommodations, or that will be made after your trip, such as spending on a rental car that is billed after your trip. If you had a prepaid package, do not include those items you listed in 18d above.

- a. What was the **TOTAL spent or expected to be spent** outside your own country, excluding a pre-paid package and the cost of international air travel?
- b. If the cost of international air travel was not part of a trip package in Question 18d, what was the total cost of the international air travel tickets including taxes and fees?
- c. How much money was spent at the airport of U.S. departure?

Amount	Country of currency	# of people included in spending

U.S. RESIDENTS – SKIP TO QUESTION 19e

- d. **For Non-U.S. Residents ONLY:** Of the total expenditure given in 19a, please estimate how much was spent, **or will be spent**, in the USA. *Specify total cost-----*
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- e. Of the total expenditure given in 19a above (for U.S. residents) or 19d above (for non-U.S. residents), please estimate (in the same currency as your response above) how much was for:

1. Accommodations/Lodging
2. Additional air transportation
3. Entertainment and recreation
4. Food and beverages
5. Ground transportation (rail, bus, taxi, etc.)
6. Shopping, gifts, and other purchases
7. Medical services
8. Other spending, if any

For U.S. Residents ONLY:

Would you be willing to participate in an online follow-up survey regarding your expenditures when you return from your trip? Yes ☐ NO ☐

If Yes, please provide an email address where we can send a link to the survey: _____